THROUGH A WOMAN'S EYE

I—ENGLAND AND THE WAR

By MAY CHRISTIE, M. A.

IT was raining in London, and the streets were black and slippery. Rain everywhere! At Piccadilly Circus the traffic was enormous. Taxis by the hundred skidded and hooted round the little "islands" where the timid hesitated, afraid to cross. Newsboys, rainsoaked, were shouting cheerfully. "Two more British liners sunk!" was their refrain. Yes, trade was brisk today.

At the pavement's edge stood a young officer, tall and stalwart. The stick he leaned on seemed superfluous. A strange hesitation was in his face. And when he spoke, his words were startling. "Bill, old boy, d'you think these new expensive legs of mine will carry me across?" he said.

"If they go back on you, return them for another pair," was the solemn answer. "At sixty pounds they should be reliable."

Across the street the damaged warrior limped, wearing his artificial limbs with the same nonchalance as a new suit—and laughter on his lips. "There isn't much of me left that's vulnerable!" he was saying. "So I'm not afraid of being run over—except that my new ankles are a perfect shape and I might not be able to get the pattern a second time."

Khaki-clad men were everywhere. Women in all varieties of uniform splashed valiantly through the rain. Female railroad porters, ticket collectors, 'bus conductors, V. A. D. workers, elevator girls, commissionaires, army nurses, army surgeons—and all competent, alert!

Into the traffic vortex swept a handsome car, and in it sat none other than famous Lloyd George, minister of munitions. Wonder of wonders! The pretty uniformed chauffeuse who handled the wheel so dexterously was Caroline Marsh, erstwhile militant suffragette, window smasher and hunger striker, who, I understand, during her imprisonment in the militant suffrage days, was forcibly fed for about four months! A lovely girl, with golden locks and exquisite blue eyes.

Still, as some one pithily observed, it was rather plucky of a cabinet minister to be driven about by a maiden with such a record! In the old days she certainly would have driven him—also herself, for the "militants" gloried in smashes—into a brick wall as a protest against her wrongs! However, these are indeed changed times.

A lady in mannish oilskins and yet more mannish stride had entered a new branch of woman's war work. "I'm a rent collector," she observed blithely, while the rain dripped down on her pleasant, smiling face, "and I can assure you that these pavements are no more slippery than my tenants! I spend days trying to catch them! At my approach, they sneak into the back yard, or the coal cellar, and little Tommie informs me that 'mother's not at home today.' But, since it's a man's job, this rent collecting, I'm gradually learning to assume a man's hard-heartedness, and am succeeding better!"

The girl interpreter in the smart uniform—by name Dorothy Matthews, graduate of Girton college, Cambridge—who is stationed in the centre of Piccadilly Circus beside the enormous policeman, was beseiged by helpless foreigners. "Please tell me where I can have my teeth extracted without payment?" a Belgian soldier implored her. "I wish to be shaved—can you help me?" murmured a liquid Italian voice. Into her long-suffering ears a Flemish lady was bewailing her lost canary and demanding instantaneous help, while strange sounds emanated from a party of long-bearded men who were obviously in need of the gifted young woman's assistance. "They're talking esperanto," said Miss Matthews cheerfully. "No, I'm not very busy—please ask any questions you like."

More helpless foreigners and more assistance rendered. Such a babble of strange tongues! "Yes, I speak six languages and am studying two more," continued the girl. "Every conceivable question in every conceivable language is hurled at my head. But I enjoy the work immensely."

Such odd figures congregated there by the fountain! Arrayed in their brilliant Paisley shawls and vivid petticoats sat the cockney flower sellers, calling their wares in a cracked crescendo that penetrated the roar of the traffic. "Roses, lovely roses, only a penny for two!" Of necessity, Cupid in khaki must pause and make a purchase for his best girl. "Damp, isn't it?" he observed cheerily as he paid his penny. "But no fear of Zeppelin raid tonight! Every cloud, however moist, has a silver lining."

Gallant boys, these fighters of Kitchener's army! From tailor's bench and loom, coal pit and lathe they have crowded. Before the war, their view of life was narrow. Football and the evening paper, with mild evenings at the movies, or a street car ride, constituted their conception of hilarity. Now they have faced death and destruction, taken immense burdens on their shoulders, been tried and proved they are men.

No room for the "slacker" today, and a vast discomfort he must feel! True, the girls no longer offer him white feathers on the street nor is he jeered at publicly. But the great recruiting notices stare at him everywhere. "It is more blessed to go than to be pushed!" he reads at every turn.

"Remember the Lusitania and Enlist Today!" flares above a vivid picture of the torpedoed liner, with dead bodies of babies and women floating in the sea.

There is one notice which particularly annoys him. In enormous letters it sprawls along the side of the buildings, and is addressed

"To the Young Women of London!

"Is your best boy wearing khaki? If not, don't you think he should be? If he does not think that you and your country are worth fighting for—do you think he is worthy of you? Don't pity the girl who is alone—her young man is probably a soldier—fighting for her and her country—and for you!

"If your young man neglects his duty, the time may come when he will neglect you! Remember this, and ask him to

Enlist at Once!"

Yes, Tommy Atkins has the best of it—brave Tommy! Just lately, I witnessed the drawing-in of a backslider to the fold. In a little English village in the County of Sussex dwelt a typical "slacker." The outbreak of hostilities had aroused no patriotism in his selfish heart. Eager and khaki-clad, the other men went off. But the "slacker" stayed behind.

Ashamed? Oh, no! A "C. O.," he styled himself conscientious objector! "I do not believe in war," he informed sundry skeptical friends. "For whom is war waged? Is not my life as valuable as any king or emperor? Who gives these crowned heads the right to say that I shall risk my life in defense of their crown?"

Five dollars a week formed the "slacker's" earnings. In English villages, the youthful bachelor can easily live on that. But, alas! up went food prices. He had to abandon luxuries. Tobacco and cigarettes were beyond his reach now. Moreover, as he was the only young man left in the village, he had to help the women in the heavier parts of their work. He didn't mind that—though digging their garden, allotments in frosty weather and doing all manner of menial tasks proved scarcely fascinating. He was asked to become an auxiliary mail carrier, too, and that involved miles of muddy tramping when the day's work was done. The pinch of poverty grew worse.

Another tribulation—the village belles no longer cast sweet glances on him. They were too busy knitting for the soldiers and sending off fat parcels labeled "Somewhere in France." The address, "British Expeditionary Force" maddened him. He, too, needed comforts as well as the soldiers. But definitely he was led to understand that sewing shirts for "slackers" was not in Sister Susy's line. Cold and the pangs of hunger grew familiar.

Then a soldier returned to the village slightly wounded. The "slacker" met him, and they talked. "Such hardships as you've undergone," began the "slacker," sympathetically.

But the soldier cut him short. "Hardships?" he said. "Do you know that we have ham and eggs for breakfast and often jam and cream? Leastways if you're near a farm you can take what you like! And, Lord! I get loads of tobacco. There isn't a woman living that hasn't sent the boys from the village a packet of cigarettes a week."

"But the danger?" began the "slacker?"

"Danger?" said the soldier. "That's the fun of it! No game is so thrilling as the chance of being killed. The fun we have—the concerts at night. And the girls!"

"Girls?" quoth the "slacker," amazed.

"Hundreds of them," said the soldier. "They come out from far behind the firing line and sing to us—real sporty girls! Can you see me coming back here to milk cows at eighteen bob a week, rising at five in the morning and leading a slave's life when I can live like a fighting cock and be called a hero?"

The "slacker" stared. "I've been working eighteen hours a day, half starved, and if anybody called me a hero——"

"He'd be a liar," said the soldier. "Well, we're both liars, old fellow, but somehow the lie looks good to me."

Next day the "slacker" walked into the recruiting office and enlisted! For to remain a "slacker" in these stirring times is far from pleasant.

Khaki-clad Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians are everywhere. Men of fine physique and dauntless bravery, they are warmly welcomed. In the English villages the old rustics stand open mouth with admiration as they swing past. The tale of their magnificent fighting in Gallipolli is well known.

Concerning the desperate struggle in the peninsula, a certain New Zealander trooper, George Ross of the Otago Mounted Rifles, had interesting experiences to relate. "The Turks had entrenched themselves only 300 yards from our lines," he said, "and before we could get them out, we had to go through the most fiendish bayonet fighting you could imagine. When the officer gave us the order to charge, and we set off at full tilt, the entire ground in front of us rose up and exploded with a terrific roar. It had been secretly mined by the wary Turks.

"Battered and shaken by the concussion, however, we pressed on through the debris, under a death-dealing fusillade from the Turkish guns. At last, with loud shouts, we stormed their parapets, and immediately were up to the eyes in battle—slashing, cutting, guarding, kicking, cursing, smashing—a hell of flashing steel and savage shrieks of hate and victory.

"There is one incident which I distinctly recollect in that awful time," continued Trooper Ross. "One of our men—a dare-devil cowboy he was—had run his bayonet almost through a Turk, but was unable to drive his thrust home because of his trenching spade, which, slung across his shoulder, impeded his action. The two men panted and glared like tigers, the Turk pinned on the bayonet and blood streaming from both of them.

"'Ye heathen devil!' shouted our man, as he vainly strove to thrust the weapon deeper into his adversary. 'Say your last prayers, for the game's up!'

"The Turk, foaming at the mouth with mingled pain and passion, wrenched an arm free and like lightning had his sword in the other's side. But his triumph was brief. Before he could complete the grisly business, a huge Maori, with demoniacal peals of laughter, leaped clear into the air and landed full on the Turk's face, almost completely flattening it. The other man was saved."

Blinded soldiers abound in England—the saddest sight that one could see. Patient and uncomplaining, they set before themselves the terrible task of beginning life all over again, with the blue light of heaven shut out forever. The streets are full of fine, handsome youths, groping their way along.

Into a big hospital a boy was brought, a mere lad of 18. When he was strong enough to hear it, they told him that he would never see again. "I don't mind," he said, and his brave smile was pathetic. But when the doctors turned away, slow tears trickled down his worn cheeks. Just a boy—very young and very homesick for his mother. "Why didn't they let me die?" he kept whispering to himself. And there are hundreds like him today in England.

Sad scenes take place in all the railroad stations when the troops go off. The women weep quite unrestrainedly, sometimes faint, or cling despairingly to the men. Into a London omnibus from the inky blackness of the streets stepped a little Jewish woman, pale and fragile. There was a curious blueness in her cheeks, and her eyes were heavy with fatigue. I saw that she carried a huge bundle containing khaki tunics. "My guv'nor works for a West End tailor," she said, "and mother and I sew steadily for sixteen hours a day, Sundays included. No, it isn't a government contract—the boss does private work for officers."

I learned that they had to "find" their own thread, and that in payment for over 100 hours of work they received—between them—from $6 to $7! And there are thousands, too, like them, in London.

Another "war slave" was a little, old-fashioned gentleman, nearing his sixties. A clerk, very polite, very nervous, rather shabby. "I have to draw up the wages in a big factory," he said apologetically, twisting his thin hands together, "and am doing the work of three men now. There's the national health insurance question, the complication of varying rates of pay, the fact that the men are permitted to draw part of their earnings in advance, and the constant cry for speed! I have two separate pay days to attend to—and sometimes I feel as if my brain would give way altogether!"

His salary was $12 a week, nor had it been raised at the outbreak of war and the resultant trebling of his labors. "Many of the men I pay get $35 a week," he said, "and the weekly average of men and boys together amounts to $16. But," smiling sadly, "there's no overtime for clerks, and we've no trade union to help us. If I were young and strong again I'd be out with a hammer, working like the men."

A pathetic, gentlemanly little figure—another victim of the war.

The cry of the children comes to our ears, too. In country districts of England many are taking the places of the men, and working far beyond their strength. A little 12-year-old boy fell sound asleep in class the other day. His teacher reproved him. A second time he fell asleep.

"Johnnie," she said, "when did you get up this morning?"

"At 4 o'clock, with only a crust of bread for breakfast," said the child, "and I was at the farm long before 5. I had to clean out all the cowsheds and the stables, and attend to the animals. We have no men to do the work now, you see."

Poor little half-starved Johnnie—with his skinny arms grown used to lifting heavy weights, his stunted body doing all the work of men!

Yes, the cry of the children is perhaps the saddest sound in the England of today!

Saw U-Boat Periscope

Havre, March 19.—The Norwegian vice consul states that an American negro seaman named Hartman, of the destroyed vessel Silius, has declared that a few seconds before the explosion which sank the Silius, he saw a stick, resembling a flagstaff, approaching the ship through the water. Hartman believes it was the periscope of a submarine.

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